



Illustration by Ezra Gilmore.

# Dear Ito

The look in your eyes,  
the confusion in your smile,  
the tears on my face when you can't  
say my name—  
memories are gone.  
A one-way street of smiles  
that only I can recall.  
“Who are you?”  
“It's me, Grandpa.”  
You laugh,  
stumbling over a fantasy tale from  
your childhood.  
I realize  
you no longer remember being part of mine.  
The pictures  
are now a constant reminder  
of who you were—  
now you are a living ghost  
of the man we all looked up to.  
How do I tell a stranger  
that he has been one of the biggest parts  
of my life?

The sound of your heartbeat  
as I hug you goodbye  
is the only familiar feeling.  
The backward cycle of fading,  
after years of strong ties.  
As you sit beside me,  
I remember the times you protected me  
from monsters in the dark.  
I hope that one day you'll look up  
and say my name.  
I'm becoming a doctor,  
just as I once dreamed.  
Though you don't remember  
the inspiring figure you were,  
I thank you for the years you gave me.

Love,  
the stranger beside you.

—Karolina Pellot Ortiz, MD